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Between Land and Water: Wetland Imaginaries and Terraqueous Relations in Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* and *Gun Island*

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Abstract

The emergence of the blue humanities has encouraged a shift from predominantly terrestrial approaches to the study of human and nonhuman relations by foregrounding the cultural, material, and ecological significance of water. Within this field, wetlands demand particular attention as dynamic interfaces between land and water, human and nonhuman life, and ecological processes and socio-political histories. This paper examines Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* (2004) and *Gun Island* (2019) through the lens of blue humanities and wetland studies. It argues that Ghosh represents wetlands not as passive geographical settings but as active and storied environments that shape human histories, identities, knowledge systems, and experiences of ecological vulnerability.

Focusing primarily on the Sundarbans in *The Hungry Tide*, the paper explores the wetland as a terraqueous and liminal space whose shifting tides, rivers, islands, and mangrove ecologies destabilize conventional distinctions between land and water. Drawing on Steve Mentz's aquatic turn, Serpil Oppermann's concept of storied waterscapes, and scholarship on wetland imaginaries, the analysis considers how the Sundarbans becomes a contested space of habitation, conservation, displacement, and environmental justice. Particular attention is given to, Fokir's embodied knowledge of the watery landscape, the cultural imagination surrounding Bon Bibi, and the history of Marichjhapi, demonstrating how ecological spaces are simultaneously shaped by cultural memory, political power, and postcolonial histories.

The paper then turns to *Gun Island* to trace the movement from the local wetland ecology of the Sundarbans toward interconnected planetary waterscapes marked by flooding, climate disruption, migration, and displacement. By reading the two novels together, the paper questions how Amitav Ghosh does employ wetland imaginaries in *The Hungry Tide* and *Gun Island* to articulate terraqueous relations and rethink human–nonhuman interconnectedness within the framework of the Blue Humanities. It proposes that Ghosh's wetland imaginaries challenge the separation of terrestrial and aquatic worlds and foreground the relationality of human and nonhuman life. Thus, the paper argues that Ghosh transforms wetlands from marginal spaces into crucial sites for rethinking ecological crisis, cultural histories, and the interconnectedness of contemporary planetary life.

Keywords: Aquatic turn, blue humanities, ecology, storied waterscapes, wetland studies.

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Introduction

The environmental humanities in recent years have been putting increasing pressure on the dominance of terrestrial viewpoints in the study of the relationships between humans and their environment. Traditional ecological and literary approaches have usually given more attention to forests, mountains, landscapes and other apparently stable types of land, whereas water has often been treated as a background, a boundary or a resource. Blue Humanities, on the other hand, have brought about a major change in terms of knowledge by positioning water and watery environments at the heart of cultural, literary, historical and ecological research. Steve Mentz's influential idea of "blue cultural studies" highlights the need to revise existing cultural models by "looking closely at the sea, rather than just the land" (997). For Mentz, the sea should not be seen simply as a space that humans cross but should be regarded as a subject in its own right, one that can lead to new ways of thinking about ecological relationships, cultural connections and human history (997). The shift towards an aquatic focus therefore questions the idea that terrestrial space should be the main framework for understanding human experience.

Blue Humanities has since gone beyond its initial focus on the oceans and maritime histories. In his later work, Mentz introduces a "poetics of planetary water" which broadens the field to include various forms of planetary water such as bodily water, glacial ice and atmospheric water (137). This is especially important since it transfers critical focus from the sea as a separate geographical feature to water as a planetary process that links up apparently remote ecological and cultural areas. On this basis, water ceases to be simply a subject of representation and instead becomes a material force that plays a part in shaping human histories, movements, vulnerabilities and imaginaries. Serpil Oppermann also describes blue humanities as a "truly transdisciplinary field" which examines planetary waters from sociocultural, literary, historical, aesthetic, ethical and theoretical points of view (1). Her definition is especially pertinent to literary studies since it prompts scholars to see waterscapes as environments that are both material and discursive. The field thus does not only ask how literature represents water but also how narratives allow us to reconsider our relationships with aquatic worlds.

A key feature of this shift towards a focus on aquatic environments is the move from a Blue Humanities approach that was centered on the ocean to one that also examines a wider range of planetary waterscapes such as rivers, lakes, wetlands, marshes, estuaries, mangroves, and deltas. Oppermann himself lists 'wetlands' as part of the planetary waterscapes studied by the Blue Humanities (1). The fact that this expansion has taken place makes wetland areas especially important since they undermine the distinction between land and water which terrestrial thought often relies upon. Wetlands are not completely land or completely water; instead, their ecological character arises from the ongoing interaction between land and water. The constant changes in their hydrological conditions, the shifting of their boundaries, tidal movements, sedimentation, erosion, salinity, and biodiversity mean that they are environments that are continually changing.

The cultural and historical importance of wetlands is just as great as their ecological significance. For a long time, they have supported human communities by means of fishing, agriculture, transportation, food production and other ways of making a living, while at the same time serving as habitats for complex networks of nonhuman life. On the other hand, they have often been culturally seen as peripheral, dangerous, unproductive, diseased or inhospitable. As Rod Giblett shows in Wetland Cultures, there has always been a sense of ambivalence about wetlands, noting that although traditional cultures have usually regarded them as sacred and as environments that provide material support, the ancient Greek and Roman cultures also linked them with disease, terror, horror and monstrosity (Giblett 33). The fact that such

contrasting views exist shows that wetlands are not simply ecological areas; they are also cultural imaginaries that have been shaped by history, beliefs, political structures and systems of knowledge.

This tension lies at the heart of the developing field of wetland studies, a field that aims to go beyond analysing wetlands solely from a scientific or ecological point of view. Increasingly, wetland studies takes into account the connections between ecological processes and cultural practices, environmental history, political power, conservation, displacement, Indigenous and local knowledge, and literary representation. Wetlands can thus be seen as what might be described as storied environments, that is, areas where ecological processes, human histories, cultural memories, and the actions of nonhuman agents become interwoven. This kind of understanding is in close agreement with Oppermann's idea of "storied waterscapes", in which water is viewed as materially active and culturally significant rather than as a passive background (1). Her method is particularly useful for wetland studies since wetlands are environments in which material change and cultural meaning are inseparable.

The idea of wetland imaginaries therefore offers a useful literary framework for looking at the way these environments are represented. These imaginaries include the ways in which marshes, mangroves, swamps, deltas, estuaries, and tidal areas are imagined, described, remembered, inhabited, controlled and disputed. Although such imaginaries can reinforce the common view of wetlands as marginal or dangerous places, they can also question this idea by showing wetlands as areas of cultural identity, ecological knowledge, spiritual importance and interaction among multiple species. Literature is especially significant in this situation since it can make apparent the connections between ecological processes, human memory, political history and nonhuman life that ordinary geographical categories might hide.

The terraqueous conceptual framework is very useful in this context. Instead of viewing land and water as distinct or opposing types, a terraqueous approach sees them as mutually defining. Wetlands show this mutual relationship since their existence relies on the constant interaction of terrestrial and aquatic processes. The boundaries of wetlands change with the tides, rainfall, flooding, sedimentation, and erosion. As a result, the wetland contradicts the idea of the landscape as something fixed and unchanging; it should be seen as a dynamic process in which land turns into water and water turns into land. This way of looking at things also has significant implications for the study of the relationships between humans and nonhumans since the human communities living in wetlands remain materially dependent on and are vulnerable to the movements of water, animals, vegetation, weather, and other ecological forces.

The way in which Blue Humanities comes together with wetland studies is especially fruitful in the fiction of Amitav Ghosh, for the imagination displayed in his writings continually deals with rivers, oceans, islands, deltas, storms, migration, climate change, and ecological vulnerability. It is particularly important for aquatic literary studies that water is not merely a recurring theme in Ghosh's work but that it often serves as both the material and the conceptual framework within which histories and human relationships are structured. Ghosh's treatment of water also relates to colonialism, globalization, migration, environmental injustice, and the climate crisis; his novels thus show how aquatic environments can become places where ecological and political histories meet.

The novel *The Hungry Tide* by Ghosh provides one of the most impressive literary depictions of a wetland area in modern South Asian fiction. It is mainly set in the Sundarbans, a region in which rivers, tidal channels, mangrove forests, islands, animals and human communities are constantly interacting. The Sundarbans is therefore not just the background against which the action of the story takes place; it actually sets the limits and possibilities of human life. The title of the book itself highlights the active role and movement of water. The tide is described as 'hungry' since the landscape is always being changed by water,

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erosion, flooding and tidal movement. The environment thus opposes the human need for fixed territorial boundaries.

This ease of flow is at the heart of the way the novel portrays terrestrial space. It is impossible to fully grasp the Sundarbans using only a terrestrial set of terms since the islands and waterways are constantly being formed and changed by water. The way the people relate to this landscape is therefore one of adaptation not of complete control. Fokir's relationship with the river is the best example of this. The deep knowledge he has of the tides, channels, currents, and dolphin habitats has been gained through direct experience rather than as a result of formal scientific education. His knowledge becomes particularly important when compared with Piya's scientific understanding of the aquatic environment. The novel thus puts together different ways of knowing and shows that ecological knowledge can be embodied, experiential, local, and relational. Fokir's accumulated knowledge eventually proves to be of value to Piya's research; it is the knowledge of the waterways that provides the basis for the map of dolphin habitats which Piya sees as representing "decades of work and volumes of knowledge" (Ghosh 328). This situation questions the preference given to institutional scientific knowledge and highlights the importance of ecological knowledge that is situated in a particular place.

Fokir's relationship with the landscape also shows the limits of the usual division between the human and the nonhuman worlds. The way he is able to move around the waterways and to identify ecological patterns is the result of his long-term physical interaction with the environment. The river is not just something that he observes from the outside; it is an environment in which he is embedded. Piya's step by step acquisition of Fokir's ecological knowledge therefore marks a shift from a purely scientific approach to a more relational way of gaining knowledge. As Laura A. White points out in her study of the novel, Fokir's knowledge comes about through his careful observation of the Sundarbans and becomes vital to Piya's understanding of the landscape (White 527). The novel thus highlights what the Blue Humanities regards as the need to think with rather than just about water.

The cultural imagination surrounding Bon Bibi further complicates the representation of the Sundarbans. The legend provides the inhabitants with an ethical and spiritual framework through which the forest, animals, humans, and supernatural forces are interconnected. The mangrove environment is consequently not represented merely as a resource to be exploited but as a space inhabited by multiple forms of life and agency. The figure of the tiger, the forest, the river, and human communities become part of a shared ecological and cultural world. Such a representation resonates with Oppermann's notion of storied waterscapes because the material environment is inseparable from the stories through which communities understand and inhabit it (1).

At the same time, Ghosh resists romanticizing the relationship between humans and the wetland. The history of Morichjhapi introduces questions of political power, displacement, conservation, and environmental justice into the novel's ecological framework. The conflict demonstrates that environmental protection is never politically neutral. The designation of the Sundarbans as a protected ecological space becomes entangled with questions concerning who has the right to inhabit the landscape and whose lives can be sacrificed in the name of conservation. The wetland therefore becomes a contested political territory in which ecological preservation, human habitation, state authority, and marginalized communities come into conflict. Ghosh's treatment of Morichjhapi demonstrates that environmental history cannot be separated from social and political history.

The significance of these concerns extends into *Gun Island* (2019), where Ghosh develops the relationship between wetland environments and planetary ecological crisis. The novel returns to the

Sundarbans but expands its geographical imagination beyond the local wetland toward a network of interconnected global waterscapes. The novel explicitly positions the Sundarbans as a frontier where human economic activity and the nonhuman world confront one another: “The Sundarbans are the frontier where commerce and the wilderness look each other directly in the eye” (Ghosh 8). The formulation is important because it identifies the wetland as a space of encounter between economic systems and ecological processes.

Gun Island further links the Sundarbans to flooding, climate disruption, migration, and displacement. The novel's ancient story of the Gun Merchant becomes intertwined with contemporary environmental transformations, suggesting that ecological instability has the power to generate new forms of movement across geographical and political boundaries. Cinta’s interpretation of the Gun Merchant’s history connects his displacement to climatic disturbances involving drought and floods (Ghosh 141). The novel therefore establishes a temporal and geographical relationship between historical migration and contemporary climate-induced displacement. Water becomes a connective force linking past and present, local and global, human movement and environmental change.

This planetary dimension is consistent with Ghosh’s critical argument in *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable*. Ghosh argues that modern literature has struggled to represent the scale and unpredictability of climate change and asks what future readers might think of a literary culture that failed to register the environmental transformations taking place around it (11). His question is particularly relevant to The Hungry Tide and Gun Island, both of which attempt to place ecological instability at the centre of narrative rather than treating it as a peripheral concern. The novels can thus be understood as fictional interventions into what Ghosh identifies as the imaginative crisis surrounding climate change.

Reading *The Hungry Tide* and *Gun Island* together therefore reveals a significant movement from local wetland ecology toward planetary water relations. The Hungry Tide concentrates on the Sundarbans as a dynamic wetland in which human communities, animals, rivers, tides, political histories, and cultural narratives intersect. Gun Island extends this ecological relationality across geographical boundaries, connecting the Sundarbans with other vulnerable waterscapes and with broader processes of climate change and migration. The movement between the two novels demonstrates that wetlands cannot be understood as isolated ecological margins. They are connected to wider hydrological, cultural, economic, and climatic systems.

The two novels consequently make an important contribution to the literary imagination of the Blue Humanities. They demonstrate that water is simultaneously material, ecological, cultural, political, historical, and narrative. Ghosh’s wetlands are not passive settings but dynamic environments that shape human knowledge, memory, movement, vulnerability, and survival. They also challenge anthropocentric assumptions by foregrounding the agency and significance of rivers, tides, mangroves, dolphins, tigers, storms, and other nonhuman forces. In doing so, Ghosh’s fiction brings together the central concerns of Blue Humanities and wetland studies: fluidity, relationality, material agency, ecological vulnerability, cultural memory, environmental justice, and planetary interconnectedness.

This paper therefore examines how Amitav Ghosh employs wetland imaginaries in *The Hungry Tide* and *Gun Island* to articulate terraqueous relations and rethink human–nonhuman interconnectedness within the framework of the Blue Humanities. Drawing on Mentz’s aquatic turn, Oppermann’s theory of storied waterscapes, and interdisciplinary approaches to wetland cultures and imaginaries, it argues that Ghosh transforms wetlands from marginal geographical spaces into crucial sites for negotiating ecological

knowledge, cultural memory, political conflict, and planetary crisis. Through Fokir's embodied knowledge, Bon Bibi's cultural imagination, the history of Morichjhapi, and the climate-induced movements represented in Gun Island, Ghosh challenges the separation of terrestrial and aquatic worlds. His fiction ultimately invites a terraqueous understanding of contemporary life, in which human existence is recognized as inseparable from the shifting waters, nonhuman lives, histories, and ecological processes that constitute the planet.

Research Objectives:

1. To examine how Amitav Ghosh represents wetlands, especially the Sundarbans, as terraqueous and storied environments in *The Hungry Tide* and *Gun Island.*

2. To analyze how these novels challenge anthropocentric and land-based perspectives by foregrounding human and non-human relationality, ecological vulnerability, displacement and climate related mobility through blue humanities and wetland studies.

Research Questions:

1. How do *The Hungry Tide* and *Gun Island* construct wetlands as dynamic sites where land, water, memory, and power are intertwined?

2. In what ways do these novels reimagine human and non-human relations and environmental crisis through the frameworks of blue humanities, wetland imaginaries, and terraqueous thought?

Research Methodology

This study follows a qualitative, interpretive, and text-centered methodology. It uses close reading as the primary method to examine characters, symbols, and spatial representations in *The Hungry Tide* and *Gun Island*. The analysis is supported by theoretical readings from blue humanities, especially Mentz's aquatic turn and planetary water framework, and Oppermann's emphasis on storied waterscapes.

The paper also adopts a comparative approach, reading the two novels together to trace the movement from local wetland ecology to planetary water imaginaries. Since it involves ecological memory, displacement, conservation, and climate crisis, the methodology can also be described as interdisciplinary, drawing on ecocriticism, postcolonial literary studies, and wetland studies.

Literature Review

Scholarship on blue humanities provides the main theoretical foundation for this study. Mentz's work is especially important because it shifts the field beyond the sea toward a broader understanding of planetary water, which helps frame wetlands as active aquatic environments rather than marginal landscapes. Oppermann similarly presents blue humanities as a transdisciplinary field concerned with the cultural, ethical, literary, and material dimensions of water, making her framework especially useful for reading water as both substance and story. Together, these scholars support the move from ocean-centered analysis to wetland-centered analysis.

Recent scholarship on Ghosh's fiction has increasingly emphasized the ecological and spatial significance of the Sundarbans. A few works on The Hungry Tideargue that the Sundarbans is a tide-dependent ecosystem shaped by conservation conflict, marginalized communities, and ecological vulnerability. Other scholarships describe the Sundarbans as a post-natural landscape and emphasize "tidal memory", reading the region as an archive of colonial violence, displacement, and climate instability

across both *The Hungry Tide* and *Gun Island*. These studies are useful because they show how the wetland is not merely background but a historical and ecological agent.

Additionally, some scholarship points to the importance of knowledge systems, mobility, and environmental justice in Ghosh's work. Analyses of *The Hungry Tide* stresses the tension between scientific knowledge and local tidal knowledge, especially through Fokir and Piya, which is central to the argument about embodied wetland knowledge. Studies of *Gun Island* emphasizesclimate migration, water as archive, and the novel's expansion from the Sundarbans to wider planetary waterscapes, which aligns closely with your reading of localtoglobal aquatic connectivity.

Research Gap

Although existing scholarship on Amitav Ghosh has examined the Sundarbans through ecocriticism, climate migration, and postcolonial environmental critique, there remains limited comparative work that specifically foregrounds wetlands as terraqueous and storied imaginaries across both *The Hungry Tide* and *Gun Island*. Most studies either concentrate on one novel, focus primarily on climate crisis or migration, or discuss water in general terms without fully theorizing the wetland as an active site where ecological, cultural, and political histories intersect.

Discussion

Although existing scholarship on Amitav Ghosh has productively examined the Sundarbans through ecocriticism, blue humanities, climate migration, and postcolonial environmental critique, limited comparative work specifically foregrounds wetlands as terraqueous and storied imaginaries across both *The Hungry Tide* (2004) and *Gun Island* (2019). Most studies concentrate on one novel, focus primarily on climate crisis or migration, or discuss water in general terms without fully theorizing the wetland as an active site where ecological, cultural, and political histories intersect. This discussion addresses that gap by reading the Sundarbans and its later planetary extensions as terraqueous spaces i.e. zones of land-water interpenetration that refuse binary separation and as storied imaginaries in which myths, oral histories, and narrative forms themselves become agents of ecological memory and ethical response. Drawing on the blue humanities, particularly the work of Steve Mentz and Serpil Oppermann, further illuminates how Ghosh's wetlands enact a water-centred poetics that challenges terrestrial bias and affirms the narrative agency of fluid matter. Mentz's insistence on "deterritorializing terrestrial habits of thought" and Oppermann's concept of "fluid-storied matter" together provide a theoretical lens through which the novels' tidal landscapes emerge not as passive settings but as generative, agentic forces that shape human and more than human destinies. The synthesis of these perspectives reveals that Ghosh's fiction does more than represent environmental crisis; it performs a blue-humanities practice of immersion, flux, and plural storytelling that is inseparable from the terraqueous materiality of the wetland itself.

The term "terraqueous", from Latin roots signifying earth and water, describes environments composed of both in dynamic, continuous exchange. In early modern usage it encompassed not only solid ground and liquid but also atmospheres, vapours, and the circulatory processes that bind them. Applied to the Sundarbans, the concept illuminates a landscape that is never fully solid or liquid. Ghosh's narrator announces this condition at the outset of *The Hungry Tide*- "There are no borders here to divide fresh water from salt, river from sea. The tides reach as far as two hundred miles inland and every day thousands of acres of forest disappear underwater, only to reemerge hours later" (Ghosh 7). The currents "reshape the islands almost daily," tearing away promontories or throwing up new sandbanks (Ghosh 7). The region is known locally as "bhatirdesh" means the tide country, because "it is only in falling that the water gives

birth to the forest" (Ghosh 8). This terraqueous ontology is not background scenery; it is the novel's governing principle. Land and water, presence and absence, permanence and erasure continually produce one another. In Mentz's terms, such a landscape performs a radical "deterritorialization", the ocean "moistens our shared ground" and forces a shift "from familiar terra to alien oceanus" (xiv). The blue humanities, as Mentz formulates them, replace "ground, land, and earth as dominant metaphors" with the recognition that "the surface of Earth is mostly Ocean" (xiv–xv). Ghosh's tide country enacts precisely this replacement, human settlement, myth, science, and memory are all continually unsettled by the fluid medium that both sustains and threatens them. The novel's opening pages thus function as a blue-humanities manifesto in fictional form, inviting readers to abandon terrestrial habits of stable mapping and instead inhabit a world defined by perpetual tidal transformation.

Steve Mentz's foundational articulation of the blue humanities provides a crucial theoretical frame for this reading. Mentz coined the phrase "blue cultural studies" (later "blue humanities") to shift critical attention from land-based, "green" environmental paradigms toward the ocean and other waters as primary sites of cultural and ecological meaning (997). In *An Introduction to the Blue Humanities*, he argues that productive scholarship in the field will "require scholars and writers to seek out plural poetics rather than a singular theory" (14). His idea "Experience is better than knowledge" and "Always allegorize" encourage an immersion that produces "the feeling of being in the water and the comprehension that flashes out from a well-crafted sentence" (Mentz 140-41). Ghosh's narrative technique in *The Hungry Tide* answers this call with remarkable precision. Readers are repeatedly placed in the position of characters straining to see through occluded water, feeling the pull of currents, or sensing the presence of unseen tigers and dolphins. Piya's binocular-mediated gaze, Fokir's silent reading of the river's surface, and Nirmal's poetic reflections on the tide's parturition all enact Mentz's preferred mode of experiential and allegorical engagement. The novel refuses the distanced, terrestrial mastery of landscape description in favour of an experiential, tidal immersion that Mentz would recognize as quintessentially bluehumanities practice. This immersion is not merely stylistic; it is epistemological. Knowledge in the tide country is produced through bodily encounter with flux rather than through the cartographic or taxonomic mastery associated with colonial and postcolonial regimes of control.

Within this fluid geography, the wetland functions as a living archive of colonial, postcolonial, and ecological violence. Nirmal's notebook, written on the island of Morichjhãpi in May 1979, records the state's eviction and massacre of refugees who had settled on land designated as a tiger reserve. The settlers' desperate claim- "Amrakara? Bastuhara. Morichjhapichharbona" ("Who are we? We are the dispossessed. We'll not leave Morichjhãpi") is met by the police announcement that the island "has to be saved for its trees, it has to be saved for its animals… it belongs to a project to save tigers, which is paid for by people from all around the world" (Ghosh 261-62). Kusum's anguished response crystallizes the novel's critique of conservation discourse- "Who are these people… who love animals so much that they are willing to kill us for them?" (Ghosh 262). The terraqueous medium itself participates in the violence and its potential erasure. As Nirmal observes, "No one knows better than I how skillful the tide country is in silting over its past" (Ghosh 69). The same tides that give birth to new islands can bury inconvenient histories, making the recovery of memory itself an act of resistance against the landscape's silting power. Here Oppermann's material eco-critical perspective becomes indispensable. In "Storied Seas and Living Metaphors in the Blue Humanities," she investigates "the terraqueous entanglements of human and marine life in material and discursive contexts through an aquatic practice of material and eco-critical theory" (Oppermann 443). Material ecocriticism, she argues, encourages us "to read the ecology of the planet's protean seas by way of their storied dimension" and to recognize that "the meanings of the sea always remain in the interstice between the discursive and the real" (Oppermann 443-44). The tide country's capacity both to reveal and to

silt over the Morichjhapi massacre exemplifies this interstice, the wetland is simultaneously a material agent of historical erasure and a discursive site from which suppressed stories can be recovered.

Serpil Oppermann's concept of "fluid-storied matter" further deepens the analysis. In *Blue Humanities: Storied Waterscapes in the Anthropocene*, she hypothesizes that "fluid storied matter and the new stories we tell can change the game by changing our mindset" (Oppermann 1-2). Water is not inert backdrop but a dynamic medium that itself generates narrative agency. Ghosh's mangroves, tides, dolphins, and crabs participate in this storied materiality, the ebb and flow do not merely frame human plots; they actively produce and erase histories, force migrations, and demand ethical recognition. Oppermann contends that "the storied sea today is a hybridizing mix of the Anthropocene dilemmas within which marine creatures play out entwined ecological crises and material intimacies," and that aquatic beings "want their voices heard, their stories recognized, and their attempts to stay alive understood" (453). In *The Hungry Tide*, the Irrawaddy dolphins Piya studies, the crabs that Fokir reads as signs, and the tigers that enforce Bon Bibi's moral boundary all function as narrative agents whose stories intersect with, and sometimes override, human ones. The novel's climatic storm sequence, in which Fokir sacrifices himself to protect Piya, can be read not simply as human tragedy but as the convergence of multiple storied agencies, the cyclone's meteorological force, the dolphin's migratory knowledge, and the fisherman's embodied literacy of the tide within a single terraqueous event. Oppermann's framework allows us to see this convergence as more than metaphor, it is the material performance of fluid-storied matter under conditions of Anthropocene acceleration.

Myth operates as a parallel and competing form of ecological knowledge within this terraqueous zone. The legend of Bon Bibi, the forest goddess who protects those of pure heart and draws a moral boundary between human settlement and the domain of the demon Dokkhin Rai, encodes an ethics of restraint and reciprocity. When Nirmal accompanies Kusum and Horen to the shrine at Garjontola, he is startled to realize that the "chimerical line" separating Bon Bibi's realm from Dokkhin Rai's is, to them, "as real as a barbed-wire fence might be to me" (Ghosh 186). This mythic topography does not romanticize the wetland; it acknowledges its lethal dangers while insisting on a negotiated coexistence. Fokir's intimate knowledge of currents, crabs, and tidal rhythms, acquired through embodied practice rather than scientific instruments, complements Piya'scetological research. Their eventual collaboration suggests that the terraqueous imaginary requires both empirical observation and storied attentiveness. In Oppermann's terms, such collaboration enacts a "relational aqueous ontology" that recognizes nonhuman narrative pathways (10). Mentz's emphasis on "plural poetics" finds concrete expression here. The novel refuses to privilege either Western science or vernacular myth, instead allowing both coexisting and cross-pollinating within the fluid medium of the tide country. The result is neither a hierarchical synthesis nor relativist equivalence, but a terraqueous epistemology in which knowledge itself is tidal, rising, falling, and reforming according to the pressures of the environment it seeks to understand.

Gun Island expands this local terraqueous imaginary into a planetary frame while retaining the Sundarbans as its imaginative and historical core. The legend of the Gun Merchant (Bonduki Sadagar) and the goddess Manasa Devi travel from the seventeenth-century delta, itself a period of climatic upheaval associated with the Little Ice Age to contemporary Venice, Los Angeles, and the Mediterranean. Nilima tells Deen that "the islands of the Sundarbans are constantly being swallowed up by the sea; they're disappearing before our eyes" (Ghosh 24). The novel insists that the wetland is not a peripheral "edge territory" but a node in global networks of trade, migration, and environmental change. Rising seas, intensifying cyclones, and saline intrusion force both human and nonhuman species to move. Tipu and Rafi's journey from the Sundarbans to Europe parallels the displacements of snakes, dolphins, and bark beetles; the novel theorizes climate migration as a multispecies phenomenon rather than a purely human

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crisis. As one character notes of the changing waters, "the flow of freshwater diminished, saltwater had begun to intrude deeper upstream making certain stretches too saline for the dolphins" (Ghosh 92). Mentz's concept of "wet globalization" is particularly apt here. For Mentz, early modern and contemporary maritime networks reveal how "multiple forms of water shape human bodies, and human histories" (7). Ghosh's narrative enacts a wet-globalized connectivity in which the Sundarbans' sinking islands are materially and narratively linked to Venice's threatened pilings and the Mediterranean's migrant routes. The Sundarbans, as Kanai remarks early in the novel, remain "the frontier where commerce and the wilderness look each other directly in the eye; that's exactly where the war between profit and Nature is fought" (Ghosh 14). By allowing myth to operate as an active narrative force, Ghosh restores to the novel a capacity for planetary storytelling that the terraqueous wetland itself demands an implicit response to the crisis of form he diagnosed in The Great Derangement. Oppermann's insistence on the co-extensivity of human realms and aquatic systems finds parallel expression. In *Gun Island*, Gun Merchant's seventeenth-century flight from Manasa Devi's serpents prefigures the twenty-first-century climate refugees who flee the same delta, while the snakes, spiders, and shipworms that appear in unexpected places insist on their own narrative presence across continents. The novel thus performs what Oppermann describes as the "hybridizing mix of the Anthropocene dilemmas" in which human and nonhuman stories become inseparable (453).

Across both texts, the wetland functions as a site of intersecting temporalities. Colonial land-reclamation schemes, the Partition of 1947, the Morichjhapi massacre, contemporary sea-level rise, and seventeenth-century climatic anomalies all coexist within the same fluid geography. The storied imaginary of the wetland is therefore not a nostalgic repository of folklore but a living, adaptive system of knowledge that can travel and mutate. Bon Bibi's ethic of limited extraction and Manasa Devi's demand for recognition both insist that human survival depends on acknowledging nonhuman agency and historical entanglement. In Oppermann's formulation, aquatic and marine entities "project a storied existence conveyed in signs, colours, sounds, signals, and codes we may or we may not yet fully understand" (453). Ghosh's tides, snakes, and dolphins similarly demand that their stories be recognized. Mentz's call for an oceanic perspective that embraces "crisis, not stability" as the defining condition of the contemporary world finds its literary realization in Ghosh's refusal of pastoral harmony or easy resolution. The novels offer, instead what Mentz terms "wet fables", stories of improvisation and collaboration with a disorderly world in flux. These wet fables are not consolatory; they are pedagogies of survival under conditions of permanent terraqueous instability.

The comparative reading also reveals a shift in scale and affect that is itself theoretically significant. *The Hungry Tide* remains largely within the bioregional intensity of the Sundarbans, its narrative energy concentrated on the intimate, often tragic negotiations between characters and local ecosystem. *Gun Island* disperses that intensity across continents, linking the delta's vulnerability to the Mediterranean refugee crisis and the wildfires of California. Yet the connective tissue remains the wetland's capacity to generate and transmit stories. The Gun Merchant's legend, like the Bon Bibi narrative, is not a static cultural artifact but a mobile form that adapts to new ecological and political conditions. In both novels, storytelling itself becomes a mode of survival and a form of resistance against the silting-over of inconvenient histories, whether the massacre at Morichjhapi or the ongoing production of climate refugees. Mentz's insistence on plural poetics (14) and Oppermann's conviction that new stories about fluid-storied matter can change mindsets (1-2) converge in Ghosh's narrative practice. The novels do not merely represent the terraqueous wetland; they perform its logic by allowing multiple, sometimes contradictory, forms of knowledge-scientific, vernacular, mythic, historical to coexist and generate new ethical possibilities. This performance is the novels' most radical contribution to the blue humanities. By refusing to resolve the tensions between

local intensity and planetary scale, between scientific data and mythic narrative, between human suffering and nonhuman agency, Ghosh models a mode of attention adequate to the terraqueous condition of the Anthropocene.

This integration of Mentz's blue humanities deterritorialization and Oppermann's fluid-storied matter reveals the deeper theoretical contribution of Ghosh's wetland fiction. The Sundarbans is not simply a vulnerable ecosystem threatened by climate change; it is a terraqueous space in which the very categories of land and water, human and nonhuman, past and present, are continually renegotiated. By attending to the material agency of tides, the narrative force of myth, and the planetary reach of local ecological disruption, Ghosh offers a literary practice that is itself blue humanities work, an immersion in flux that refuses terrestrial mastery and insists on the ethical urgency of listening to the stories water tells. The novels thereby answer Oppermann's call for discourses that move "beyond the conventions of tentacular anthropocentric thought" and Mentz's demand for plural, experiential, and allegorical engagements with the blue planet (Mentz 1,14, Oppermann 140-41).

Conclusion

The Hungry Tide and *Gun Island* demonstrate that the wetland is far more than a backdrop for climate fiction or a case study in postcolonial environmental injustice. It is a terraqueous and storied imaginary, a dynamic interface of land and water that actively shapes ecological, cultural, and political relations. By attending to the wetland's specific material and mythic properties and by aligning them with Mentz's blue humanities deterritorialization of terrestrial thought and Oppermann's insistence on fluid-storied matter, Ghosh moves beyond generalized treatments of "water" or "climate crisis" to theorize a distinctive environmental ontology. In this ontology, boundaries are provisional, histories are silted yet recoverable, and stories function as technologies of memory and ethical orientation that include the narrative agency of water itself.

This comparative framing addresses a clear lacuna in existing scholarship. While individual novels have been productively examined through ecocriticism, and migration studies, the sustained focus on the wetland as terraqueous and storied allows us to see the continuity and transformation of Ghosh's environmental imagination across fifteen years. The Sundarbans of *The Hungry Tide* is not simply left behind in *Gun Island*; it becomes the generative matrix for a planetary narrative in which every sinking island, every displaced migrant, and every anomalous animal movement carries the imprint of the tide country's fluid logic. Mentz's call for wet fables and plural poetics, together with Oppermann's vision of fluid storied matter capable of changing mindsets, find their most compelling literary realization in Ghosh's dual engagement with the local intensity of the mangrove delta and its global reverberations.

Thus, Ghosh's novels suggest that literature's contribution to the environmental humanities lies not only in representing crisis but in cultivating the imaginative capacities required to inhabit a terraqueous world. In an era when sea-level rise, intensifying storms, and forced migration are rewriting coastlines and lives, the storied imaginaries of the wetland, read through Mentz's oceanic turn and Oppermann's material-ecocritical insistence on the narrative agency of water offer resources for thinking for recognizing nonhuman agency, for recovering suppressed histories, and for inventing forms of solidarity that cross the false divides of land and water, human and more than human, local and planetary. The task of criticism, in turn, is to keep those stories in circulation to prevent the tide country from silting over its own past, and to ensure that its lessons continue to travel across the blue expanses of a planet whose surface is, as Mentz reminds us, mostly ocean.

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